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# THE JUDGEMENT OF VALHALLA

BY  
GILBERT FRANKAU



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# The Judgement of Valhalla

By GILBERT FRANKAU

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## *THE DESERTER*

“I’m sorry I done it, Major.”  
We bandaged the livid face;  
And led him out, ere the wan sun rose,  
To die his death of disgrace.

The bolt-heads locked to the cartridge;  
The rifles steadied to rest,  
As cold stock nestled at colder cheek  
And foresight lined on the breast.

“*Fire!*” called the Sergeant-Major.  
The muzzles flamed as he spoke:  
And the shameless soul of a nameless man  
Went up in the cordite-smoke.

## THE EYE AND THE TRUTH

Up from the fret of the earth-world, through  
the Seven Circles of Flame,  
With the seven holes in Its tunic for sign of  
the death-in-shame,  
To the little gate of Valhalla the coward-  
spirit came.

Cold, It crouched in the man-strong wind that  
sweeps Valhalla's floor;  
Weak, It pawed and scratched on the wood;  
and howled, like a dog, at the Door  
Which is shut to the souls who are sped in  
shame, for ever and evermore:

For It snuffed the Meat of the Banquet-  
boards where the Threefold Killers sit,  
Where the Free Beer foams to the tankard-  
rim, and the Endless Smokes are lit. . . .  
And It saw the Nakéd Eye come out above  
the lintel-slit.

And now It quailed at Nakéd Eye which  
judges the naked dead;  
And now It snarled at Nakéd Truth that  
broodeth overhead;  
And now It looked to the earth below where  
the gun-flames flickered red.

It muttered words It had learned on earth,  
the words of a black-coat priest  
Who had bade It pray to a pulpit god—but  
ever Eye's Wrath increased;  
And It knew that Its words were empty  
words, and It whined like a homeless  
beast:

Till, black above the lintel-slit, the Nakéd Eye  
went out;  
Till, loud across the Killer-Feasts, It heard  
the Killer-Shout—  
The three-fold song of them that slew, and  
died . . . and had no doubt.

## THE SONG OF THE RED-EDGED STEEL

*Below your black priest's heaven,  
Above his tinselled hell,  
Beyond the Circles Seven,  
The Red-Steel Killers dwell—  
The men who drave, to blade-ring home, be-  
hind the marching shell.*

We knew not good nor evil,  
Save only right of blade;  
Yet neither god nor devil  
Could hold us from our trade,  
When once we watched the barrage lift, and  
splendidly afraid

Came scrambling out of cover,  
And staggered up the hill. . . .  
The bullets whistled over;  
Our sudden dead lay still;  
And the mad machine-gun chatter drove us  
fighting-wild to kill.

Then the death-light lit our faces,  
And the death-mist floated red  
O'er the crimson cratered places  
Where his outposts crouched in  
dread. . . .  
And we stabbed or clubbed them as they  
crouched; and shot them as they fled;



And floundered, torn and bleeding,  
Over trenches, through the wire,  
With the shrapnel-barrage leading  
To the prey of our desire—  
To the men who rose to meet us from the  
blood-soaked battle-mire;

Met them; gave and asked no quarter;  
But, where we saw the Gray,  
Plunged the edged steel of slaughter,  
Stabbed home, and wrenched away. . . .  
Till red wrists tired of killing-work, and none  
were left to slay.

Now—while his fresh battalions  
Moved up to the attack—  
Screaming like angry stallions,  
His shells came charging back,  
And stamped the ground with thunder-hooves  
and pawed it spouting-black

And breathed down poison-stenches  
Upon us, leaping past. . . .  
Panting, we turned his trenches;  
And heard—each time we cast  
From parapet to parados—the scything bul-  
let-blast.

Till the whistle told his coming;  
Till we flung away the pick,

Heard our Lewis guns' crazed drumming,  
Grabbed our rifles, sighted quick,  
Fired . . . and watched his wounded  
writhing back from where his dead  
lay thick.

So we laboured—while we lasted:  
Soaked in rain or parched in sun;  
Bullet-riddled; fire-blasted;  
Poisoned: fodder for the gun:  
So we perished, and our bodies rotted in the  
ground they won.

It heard the song of the First of the Dead, as  
It couched by the lintel-post;  
And the coward-soul would have given Its  
soul to be back with the Red-Steel  
host. . . .

But Eye peered down; and It quailed at the  
Eye; and Nakéd Truth said: "Lost."

And Eye went out. But It might not move;  
for, droned in the dark, It heard  
The Second Song of the Killer-men—word  
upon awful word  
Cleaving the void with a shrill, keen sound  
like the wings of a pouncing bird.

## THE SONG OF THE CRASHING WING

*Higher than tinselled heaven,  
Lower than angels dare,  
Loop to the fray, swoop on their prey,  
The Killers of the Air.*

We scorned the Galilean,  
We mocked at Kingdom-Come :  
The old gods knew our pæan—  
Our dawn-loud engine-hum :

The old red gods of slaughter,  
The gods before the Jew !  
We heard their cruel laughter,  
Shrill round us, as we flew :

When, deaf to earth and pity,  
Blind to the guns beneath,  
We loosed upon the city  
Our downward-plunging death.

The Sun-God watched our fighting ;  
No Christian priest could tame  
Our deathly stuttered fighting :—  
The whirled drum, spitting flame ;

The roar of blades behind her ;  
The banking plane up-tossed ;  
The swerve that sought to blind her ;  
Masked faces, glimpsed and lost ;

The joy-stick wrenched to guide her ;  
The swift and saving zoom,  
What time the shape beside her  
Went spinning to its doom.

No angel-wings might follow  
Where, poised behind the fray,  
We spied our Lord Apollo  
Stoop down to mark his prey—

The hidden counter-forces ;  
The guns upon the road ;  
The tethered transport-horses,  
Stampeding, as we showed—

Dun hawks of death, loud-roaring—  
A moment to their eyes :  
And slew ; and passed far-soaring ;  
And dwindled up the skies.

But e'en Apollo's pinions  
Had faltered where we ran,  
Low through his veiled dominions,  
To lead the charging van !

The tree-tops slathered under ;  
The Red-Steel Killers knew,  
Hard overhead, the thunder  
And backwash of her screw ;

The blurred clouds raced above her ;  
The blurred fields streaked below,

Where waited, crouched to cover,  
The foremost of our foe ;  
Banking, we saw his furrows  
Leap at us, open wide :  
Hell-raked the man-packed burrows ;  
And crashed—and crashing, died.

It heard the song of the Dead in Air, as It  
huddled against the gate ;  
And once again the Eye peered down—red-  
rimmed with scorn and hate  
For the shameless soul of the nameless one  
who had neither foe nor mate.

And Eye was shut. But Nakéd Truth bent  
down to mock the Thing :—

“Thou hast heard the Song of the Red-edged  
Steel, and the Song of the Crashing  
Wing :

Shall the word of a black-coat priest avail at  
Valhalla’s harvesting ?

Shalt *thou* pass free to the Seven Halls—  
whose life in shame was sped ?”

And Truth was dumb. But the brooding word  
still echoed overhead,  
As roaring down the void outburst the last  
loud song of the dead.

## THE SONG OF THE GUNNER-DEAD

*In Thor's own red Valhalla,  
Which priest may not unbar;  
But only Nakéd Truth and Eye,  
Last arbiters of War;  
Feast, by stark right of courage,  
The Killers from Afar.*

We put no trust in heaven,  
We had no fear of hell;  
But lined, and ranged, and timed to clock,  
Our barrage-curtains fell,  
When guns gave tongue and breech-blocks  
    swung  
And palms rammed home the shell.

The Red-Steel ranks edged forward,  
And vanished in our smoke;  
Back from his churning craters,  
The Gray Man reeled and broke;  
While, fast as sweat could lay and set,  
Our rocking muzzles spoke.

We blew him from the village;  
We chased him through the wood:  
Till, tiny on the crest-line  
    Where once his trenches stood,  
We watched the wag of sending flag  
That told our work was good:

Till, red behind the branches,  
The death-sun sank to blood;  
And the Red-Steel Killers rested. . . .  
But we, by swamp and flood,  
Through mirk and night—his shells for  
light—  
Blaspheming, choked with mud,  
Roped to the tilting axles,  
Man-handled up the crest;  
And wrenched our plunging gun-teams  
Foam-flecked from jowl to breast,  
Downwards, and on, where trench-lights  
shone—

For *we*, we might not rest!

Shell-deafened; soaked and sleepless;  
Short-handed; under fire;  
Days upon nights unending,  
We wrought, and dared not tire—  
With whip and bit from dump to pit,  
From pit to trench with wire.

The Killers in the Open,  
The Killers down the Wind,  
They saw the Gray Man eye to eye—  
But *we*, we fought him blind,  
Nor knew whence came the screaming  
flame  
That killed us, miles behind.

Yet, when the triple rockets  
Flew skyward, blazed and paled,  
For sign the lines were broken;  
When the Red Steel naught availed;  
When, through the smoke, on shield and  
spoke  
His rifle bullets hailed;

When we waited, dazed and hopeless,  
Till the layer's eye could trace  
Helmets, bobbing just above us  
Like mad jockeys in a race. . . .  
Then—loaded, laid, and unafraid,  
We met him face to face;

Jerked the trigger; felt the trunnions  
Rock and quiver; saw the flail  
Of our zero-fuses blast him;  
Saw his gapping ranks turn tail;  
Heard the charging-cheer behind us . . .  
And dropped dead across the trail.



## VALHALLA'S VERDICT

It heard the Song of the Gunner-Dead die out  
to a sullen roar :

But Nakéd Truth said never a word ; and Eye  
peered down no more.

For Eye had seen ; and Truth had judged  
. . . and It might not pass the Door !

And now, like a dog in the dark, It shrank  
from the voice of a man It knew :—

“There are empty seats at the Banquet-board,  
but there's never a seat for you ;  
For they will not drink with a coward soul,  
the stark red men who slew.

There's meat and to spare, at the Killer-  
Feasts where Thor's swung hammer  
twirls ;

There's beer and enough, in the Free Canteen  
where the Endless Smoke upcurls ;

There are lips and lips, for the Killer-Men, in  
the Hall of the Dancing-Girls.

There's a place for any that passes clean—  
but for you there's enver a place :

The Endless Smoke would blacken your lips,  
and the Girls would spit in your face ;

And the Beer and the Meat go sour on your  
guts—for you died the death of disgrace.

We were pals on earth: but by God's brave  
    Son and the bomb that I reached too late,  
I damn the day and I blast the hour when  
    first I called you mate;  
And I'd sell my soul for one of my feet, to  
    hack you from the gate—

To hack you hence to the lukewarm hells that  
    the priest-made ovens heat,  
Or the faked-pearl heaven of pulpit gods,  
    where the sheep-faced angels bleat  
And the halo's rim is as hard to the head as  
    the gilded floor to the feet.”

\*           \*           \*           \*           \*

It heard the stumps of Its one-time mate go  
    waddling back to the Feast.  
And, once and again, It whined for the Meat;  
    ere It slunk, like a tongue-lashed beast,  
To the tinselled heaven of pulpit gods and the  
    tinselled hell of their priest.

# Aimée



## *WIFE AND COUNTRY*

Dear, let me thank you for this:

That you made me remember, in fight,  
England—all mine at your kiss,  
At the touch of your hands in the night:  
England—your giving's delight.

## MOTHER AND MATE

Lightly she slept, that splendid mother mine  
Who faced death, undismayed, two hopeless  
years . . .

(“Think of me sometimes, son, but not with  
tears  
Lest my soul grieve,” she writes. Oh, this  
divine  
Unselfishness!) . . .

Her favourite print smiled down—  
The stippled Cupid, Bartolozzi-brown—  
Upon my sorrow. Fire-gleams, fitful, played  
Among her playthings — Toby mugs and  
jade. . . .

And then I dreamed that — suddenly,  
strangely clear—  
A voice I knew not, faltered at my ear:  
“Courage!” . . . Your own dear voice,  
loved since, and known!

And now that she sleeps well, come times *her*  
voice  
Whispers in day-dreams: “Courage, son!  
Rejoice  
That, leaving you, I left you not alone.”

## MEETING

I came from the City of Fear,  
From the scarred brown land of pain,  
Back into life again . . .  
And I thought, as the leave-boat rolled  
Under the veering stars—  
Wind a-shriek in her spars—  
Shivering there, and cold,  
Of music, of warmth, and of wine—  
To be mine  
For a whole short week . . .  
And I thought, adrowse in the train,  
Of London, suddenly near;  
And of how—small doubt—I should find  
There, as of old,  
Some woman—foolishly kind:  
Fingers to hold,  
A cheek,  
A mouth to kiss—and forget,  
Forget in a little while,  
Forget  
When I came again  
To the scarred brown land of pain,  
To the sodden things and the vile,  
And the tedious battle-fret.

My dear,  
I cannot forget!

Not even here  
In this City of Fear.

I remember the poise of your head,  
And your look, and the words you said  
When we met,  
And the waxen bloom at your breast,  
And the sable fur that caressed  
Your smooth white wrists, and your  
    hands . . .

Remember them yet,  
Here  
In the desolate lands;  
Remember your shy  
Strange air,  
And growing aware—  
I,  
Who had reckoned love  
Man's toy for an hour—  
Of love's hidden power:  
A thrill  
That moved me to touch and adore  
Some intimate thing that you wore—  
A glove,  
Or the flower  
A-glow at your breast,  
The frill  
Of fur that circled your wrist . . .  
These, had my hands caressed;

These, not you, had I kissed—  
I,  
Who had thought love's fires  
Only desires.

Dear,  
That hidden power thrills in me yet.  
There is never one hour—  
Not even here  
In this City of Fear—  
When I quite forget.

## MUSIC AND WINE

When the ink has dried on the pen,  
When the sword returns to its sheath;  
When the world of women and men,  
And the waters around and beneath,  
Char and shrivel and burn—

What will God give in return? . . .  
Has He better to offer in heaven above  
Than wine and music, laughter and love?

Laughter, music and wine,  
The promise of love in your eyes . . .  
Sleeping, I dream them mine;  
Waking, my spirit cries—  
Here in the mud and the rain—

“God, give me London again!  
I would lose all earth and the heavens above  
For just one banquet of laughter and love.”

When my flesh returns to its earth,  
When my pen is dust as my sword;  
If one thing I wrought find worth  
In the eyes of our kindly Lord,  
I will only ask of His grace  
That He grant us a lowly place  
Where his warriors toast Him, in heaven  
above,  
With wine and music, laughter and love.



## THE GAMBLE

If man backs horses, plays cards or dice,  
Or bets on an ivory ball,  
He knows the rules, and he reckons the  
price—

Be it one half-crown, or his all.  
(And it isn't sense, and it isn't pluck,  
To double the stakes when you're out of  
luck!)

If he plays—with his life for a limit—here,  
It's an even-money game:  
He can lay on the Red—which is Conquered  
Fear,

Or the Black—which is Utter Shame.  
(And there isn't much choice between Reds  
and Blacks,  
For Death throws "zero" whichever he  
backs.)

So that whether man plays for the red gold's  
wealth

Where the little ball clicks and spins,  
Or hazards his life in the black night's stealth  
When machine-gun fire begins—  
It's a limited gamble; and each of us knows  
What he stands to lose ere the tables close.

But woman's gamble—(there's only one:  
And it takes some pluck to play,

When the rules are broke ere the game's  
begun;

When, lose *or* win, you must pay!)—  
Is a double wager on human kind,  
A limitless risk—and she goes it blind.

For she stakes, at love, on a single throw,  
Pride, Honour, Scruples and Fears,  
And dreams no lover can hope to know,  
And the gold of the after-years.

(And all for a man; and there's no man lives  
Who is worth the odds that a woman gives.)

So that since you hazarded this for me  
On the day love's die was cast,  
I'll love you—gambler!—while “fours” beat  
three;

And I'll lay on our love to last,  
So long as a man will wager a price  
On a horse or a card or the ball or the dice.

## NINON AND ROSES

Here, in a land where hardly a rose is,  
    Silkiest blossoms of broidered flowers  
Brush my cheek as each tired eye closes,  
    Haunt my sleep through the desolate hours.

Roses never of nature's making,  
    Roses loved for a rose-red night,  
Roses visioned at dawn-light's breaking  
    Veiling a bosom as roses white!

Why does the ghost of you linger and stay  
    with me—

    Ghost of the rose-buds that perfumed our  
    bed,

Ghost of a rose-girl who blossomed to play  
    with me—

    Here in a land where the roses are dead?

Day-time and night-time the death-flower  
    blazes,

    Saffron at gun-lip and orange and red,  
Here where June's rose-tree lies shattered as  
    May's is,

    Here where I dream of the nights that are  
    dead—

Nights that were sweet with the scent and  
    the touch of you,

Rose-girl in ninon with buds at your  
breast,  
Rose-girl who promised and granted so much  
of you,  
All that was tender and all that was best.

Growl of the guns cannot shatter the dream  
of you,  
Banish the thought of one exquisite hour,  
Or the scent of your hair in the dawn, or the  
gleam of you  
White as white roses through roses a-  
flower.

## PARTING

Times more than once, all ways about the  
world,

Have I clasped hands; waved sorrowful  
good-bye;

Watched far cliffs fading, till my sea-wake  
swirled

To mingle bluely with a landless sky:

Then—even as the sea-drowned cliffs be-  
hind—

Felt sorrow drowning into memory;  
And heard, in every thrill of every wind,  
New voices welcoming across the sea.

Until it seemed nor land nor love had power  
To hold my heart in any firm duress:

Grieving, I sorrowed but a little hour;

Loving, I knew desire's sure faithfulness:

Until, by many a love dissatisfied,

Of each mistrustful and to each untrue,

I found—as one who, having long denied,

Finds faith at last—this greater Love, in  
you.

Parting? We are not parted, woman mine!

Though hands have clasped, though lips  
have kissed good-bye;

Though towns glide past, and fields, and fields  
of brine—

My body takes the warrior-way, not I.  
I am still with you ; you, with me ; one heart ;  
One equal union, soul to certain soul :  
Time cannot sever us, nor sorrow part,  
Nor any sea, who keep our vision whole.

How can I grieve, who know your spirit near ;  
Who watch with newly understanding eyes  
This England of your giving, newly dear,  
Sink where my sea-wake swirls to darkling  
skies ?

Lilac, her cliffs have faded into mist. . . .  
Yet still I hold them white in memory,  
Feeling, against these lips your lips have  
kissed,  
The home-wind thrilling down an English  
sea.

# The Other Side

---

## *THE OTHER SIDE*

Just got your letter and the poems. Thanks.  
You always were a brainy sort of chap:  
Though pretty useless as a subaltern—  
Too much imagination, not enough  
Of that rare quality, sound commonsense  
And so you've managed to get on the Staff:  
Influence, I suppose: a Captain, too!  
How do tabs suit you? Are they blue or  
green?

About your book. I've read it carefully,  
So has Macfaddyen (you remember him,  
The light-haired chap who joined us after  
Loos?);  
And candidly, we don't think much of it.  
The piece about the horses isn't bad;  
But all the rest, excuse the word, are tripe—  
The same old tripe we've read a thousand  
times.

My grief, but we're fed up to the back-teeth  
With war-books, war-verse, all the eye-wash  
stuff  
That seems to please the idiots at home.

You know the kind of thing, or used to know :  
“Heroes who laugh while Fritz is strafing  
them”—

(I don't remember that *you* found it fun,  
The day they shelled us out of Blouwpoot  
Farm!)

“After the fight. Our cheery wounded. Note  
The smile of victory : it won't come off”—

(Of course they smile ; so'd you, if you'd  
escaped,

And saw three months of hospital ahead. . . .  
They don't smile, much, when they're shipped  
back to France!)

“Out for the Great Adventure”—(twenty-  
five

Fat, smirking wasters in some O.T.C.,  
Who just avoided the Conscription Act!)

“A strenuous woman-worker for the Cause”—  
(Miss Trixie Toogood of the Gaiety,  
Who helped to pauperize a few Beligues  
In the great cause of self-advertisement!) . . .

Lord knows, the newspapers are bad enough ;  
But they've got some excuse—the censor-  
ship—

Helping to keep their readers' spirits up—  
Giving the public what it wants : (besides,  
One mustn't blame the press, the press has  
done



More than its share to help us win this war—  
More than some other people I could name) :  
But what's the good of war-books, if they fail  
To give civilian-readers an idea  
Of what life *is* like in the firing-line? . . .

You might have done that much; from you,  
at least,

I thought we'd get an inkling of the truth.  
But no; you rant and rattle, beat your drum,  
And blow your two-penny trumpet like the  
rest:

“Red battle's glory,” “honour's utmost task,”  
“Gay jesting faces of undaunted boys,” . . .  
The same old Boys'-Own-Paper balderdash!

Mind you, I don't deny that they exist,  
These abstract virtues which you gas about—  
(*We shouldn't stop out here long, other-  
wise!*)—

Honour and humour, and that sort of thing;  
(Though heaven knows where you found the  
glory-touch,

Unless you picked it up at G.H.Q.) ;  
But if you'd commonsense, you'd understand  
That humour's just the Saxon cloak for fear,  
Our English substitute for “*Vive la France,*”  
Or else a trick to keep the folk at home  
From being scared to death—as we are  
scared;

That honour . . . damn it, honour's the  
one thing

No soldier yaps about, except of course  
A soldier-*poet*—three-and-sixpence net.

Honest to God, it makes me sick and tired  
To think that you, who lived a year with us,  
Should be content to write such tommy-rot.  
I feel as though I'd sent a runner back  
With news that we were being strafed like  
Hell . . .

And he'd reported: "Everything O. K."  
Something's the matter: either you can't *see*,  
Or else you see, and cannot write—that's  
worse.

Hang it, you can't have clean forgotten things  
You went to bed with, woke with, smelt and  
felt,

All those long months of boredom streaked  
with fear:

Mud, cold, fatigue, sweat, nerve-strain, sleep-  
lessness,

And men's excreta viscid in the rain,  
And stiff-legged horses lying by the road,  
Their bloated bellies shimmering, green with  
flies . . .

*Have* you forgotten? you who dine to-night  
In comfort at the Carlton or Savoy.

(Lord, but I'd like a dart at that myself—  
Oysters, *crème* something, sole *vin blanc*, a  
bird,

And one cold bottle of the very best—  
A girl to share it: afterwards, a show—  
Lee White and Alfred Lester, Nelson Keys;  
Supper to follow.

. . . Our Brigade's in rest—  
The usual farm. I've got the only bed.  
The men are fairly comfy—three good barns.  
Thank God, they didn't have to bivouac  
After this last month in the Salient.) . . .

You *have* forgotten; or you couldn't write  
This sort of stuff—all cant, no guts in it,  
Hardly a single picture true to life.

Well, here's a picture for you: Montauban—  
Last year—the flattened village on our left—  
On our right flank, the razed Briqueterie,  
Their five-nines pounding bits to dustier  
bits—

Behind, a cratered slope, with batteries  
Crashing and flashing, violet in the dusk,  
And prematuring every now and then—  
In front, the ragged Bois de Bernafay,  
Bosche whizz-bangs bursting white among its  
trees.

You had been doing F.O.O. that day ;  
(The Staff knows why we had an F.O.O. :  
One couldn't flag-wag through Trônes Wood ;  
the wires

Went down as fast as one could put them up ;  
And messages by runner took three hours.)

I got the wind up rather : you were late,  
And they'd been shelling like the very deuce.

However, back you came. I see you now,  
Staggering into "mess"—a broken trench,  
Two chalk-walls roofed with corrugated iron,  
And, round the traverse, Driver Noakes's  
stove

Stinking and smoking while we ate our grub.  
Your face was blue-white, streaked with dirt ;  
your eyes

Had shrunk into your head, as though afraid  
To watch more horrors ; you were sodden-wet  
With greasy coal-black mud—and other  
things.

Sweating and shivering, speechless, there  
you stood.

I gave you whisky, made you talk. You said :  
"Major, another signaller's been killed."

"Who?"

"Gunner Andrews, blast them. O  
my Christ!

His head—split open—when his brains oozed  
out,  
They looked like bloody sweetbreads, in the  
muck.”

And you're the chap who writes this clap-  
trap verse!

Lord, if I'd half *your* brains, I'd write a  
book:

None of your sentimental platitudes,  
But something real, vital; that should strip  
The glamour from this outrage we call war,  
Shewing it naked, hideous, stupid, vile—  
One vast abomination. So that they  
Who, coming after, till the ransomed fields  
Where our lean corpses rotted in the ooze,  
Reading my written words, should under-  
stand

This stark stupendous horror, visualize  
The unutterable foulness of it all. . . .  
I'd shew them, not your glamorous “glorious  
game,”

Which men play “jesting” “for their hon-  
our's sake”—

(A kind of Military Tournament,  
With just a hint of danger—bound in  
cloth!)—

But War,—as war is now, and always was:

A dirty, loathsome, servile murder-job:—  
Men, lousy, sleepless, ulcerous, afraid,  
Toiling their hearts out in the pulling slime  
That wrenches gum-boot down from bleeding  
heel

And cakes in itching arm-pits, navel, ears:  
Men stunned to brainlessness, and gibbering:  
Men driving men to death and worse than  
death:

Men maimed and blinded: men against ma-  
chines—

Flesh versus iron, concrete, flame and wire:  
Men choking out their souls in poison-gas:  
Men squelched into the slime by trampling  
feet:

Men, disembowelled by guns five miles away,  
Cursing, with their last breath, the living  
God

Because he made them, in His image, men. . . .  
So—were your talent mine—I'd write of war  
For those who, coming after, know it not.

And if posterity should ask of me  
What high, what base emotions keyed weak  
flesh

To face such torments, I would answer:  
“*You!*”

Not for themselves, O daughters, grandsons,  
sons,

Your tortured forebears wrought this miracle;

Not for themselves, *accomplished utterly*  
This loathliest task of murderous servitude;  
But just because they realized that thus,  
*And only thus*, by sacrifice, might they  
Secure a world worth living in—*for you.*" . . .

Good-night, my soldier-poet. *Dormez bien!*

# “One of Them”

*Being in Some Respects a Sequel to “One of Us”*

## I.

*Wherein the bard—released from War’s  
confusions—*

*Preludes with egotistical allusions.*

Six years ago—or is it six-and-twenty?

(How vast the gulf from those ecstatic  
days!)—

When the whole earth snored on in slothful  
plenty

(Tho’ poets cashed small pittance for  
their lays) ;

When war appeared less real than G. A.  
Henty,

And Oxo’s snaky signs were yet ablaze ;  
When all seemed peaceful as the press of  
Cadbury,

And no one dreamed of bombs, or bet a  
Bradbury ;

Or e’er stern Mars had roped us in his  
tether,

Ere British guns had thundered at Le  
Câteau :

We fitted out—my Muse and I together—

And launched adown the galley-slips of  
Chatto



A barque of verse, full-rigged for halcyon  
weather,

Which many a critic judged to take the  
*gâteau*:

(Though some there were, high pundits of  
disparity,

Who wept at our unscholarly vulgarity).

We have sailed far since then; crossed our  
horizon;

Published our loves and travels in a  
novel

(A tale, men say, that Peckham's flapper  
cries on,

So that both Boots and Smith's before us  
grovel);

And eaten ration bully-beef—with flies on;  
And sheltered gratefully in many a  
hovel,

What time we sang of guns and gore and  
trenches—

Instead of oysters, tango-teas and wenches.

For times have changed since we wrote  
"One of Us":

*Et nos mutamus*—more or less—in *illis*.  
Muse finds herself *in urbe* somewhat *rus*;

And I—if I disport with Amaryllis—  
Where once my motor flashed, prefer a  
'bus;

And shuddering note how vast the sup-  
per-bill is;  
And signing, sigh in secret for the calm,  
Chaste, cheap seclusion of my Chiltern farm.

Yes, Muse and I are tired, and super-  
serious:

Her damask cheek is lined a bit, and  
wrinkled.

We are grown old, and London's late nights  
weary us:

While the gold wine that erst in ice-pail  
tinkled,

Her doctor finds extremely deleterious;

And mine forbids me red lips, passion-  
crinkled:

So now we cultivate domestic habits

Amongst our pigs, our poultry, and our rab-  
bits.

Yet sometimes, as we trench our stubborn  
soil,

Or feed our sows, or strow the peat-  
moss litter,

Or set the morrow's chicken-mash to boil,

Or wander out where our young turkeys  
twitter,

Or read by mellow candle-light—since oil

Is dear and scarce; or talk—a little bitter

Because we find that Food Control Com-  
mittees

Are all composed of men brought up in cities ;

Sometimes, in this five-acre paradise

Whither my nerve-racked spirit fled the  
battle

Deferring to sound Harley Street ad-  
vice—

A silver badge its only martial chattel),  
I hear a voice, loud as the market price

That butchers bid for Rhondda's missing  
cattle,

Voice of my Muse, still vibrant with old pas-  
sion,

Telling how poetry is now the fashion.

“Look you,” she cries, “the Wheels are turn-  
ing, turning.

Though Pegasus long since wore out his  
pinions,

Somehow his shod hooves keep the bread-  
mills churning.

Shrill, night and day, sing Marsh Geor-  
gian minions :

Each sinking sun sets some new Noyes a-  
burning,

Each rising moon reveals fresh hordes  
of Binyons ;

Who batten fat on unsuspecting editors,  
And—unlike you—contrive to pay their cred-  
itors.

“Poet, forsooth! You agricultural brute!

Have you no soul above the weight of  
porkers?

Was it for this I hearkened to your suit,  
Gave you my metres and my rhymes—  
some, corkers?

Up, Gilbert! rummage out your rusty lute:  
Polish it blacker than your black Mi-  
norcas:

And let its notes once more, in refluent  
stanzas,

Dower the Income-tax with glad Bonanzas.”

So she; and—since I loathe to disappoint

The least illusion of the equal sex—

Let Byron's oil once more these locks  
anoint,

Once more let honour meet these Cox-  
drawn cheques . . .

Though well I know that times are spare  
of joint,

And satire's song less like to please than  
vex;

Now small beer, Smallwood, raids and strikes  
and rations,

Have near eclipsed the gaiety of nations:

Still, let me sing. Yet not as once I sung:  
Love, fear, and death have chastened,  
sobered, saddened,  
One who knew life's full burden-time too  
young;  
Whom never youth's unhampered free-  
dom gladdened,  
But only envy and ambition stung,  
And fickle passions—in love's semblance  
maddened;  
So that he needs must tumble now, poor  
clown,  
On this Pindaric stage for half-a-crown:

Yet one who, 'spite a past that shocked St.  
Tony

And paid recording angels overtime,  
Still holds his own at sonnet or *cazone*.

As some shall know who follow this, my  
rhyme—

Some few: for gladly would I lay a pony,  
Or larger sum, against a ten-cent dime,  
That most of those who read this metred  
tract'll

Not know a spondee from a pterodactyl.

## II.

*Explains—a task few modern penmen  
shirk—*

*The sociology of this great work.*

God bless Democracy, George Bernard  
Shaw,

And William Dunn, our sanest, saintliest  
hatter!

God bless that great anomaly, the Law;

Aye, may our knights on hoarded tea  
wax fatter!

God bless Sir Arthur Yapp's unfailing jaw,  
Lord Lansdowne's pen, and brave Hora-  
tio's chatter!

And—lest in England Bolos quite prevail—

God bless King Northcliffe and his "Daily  
Mail!"

Long live the old Press—"Times," "D. T.,"  
"Spectator"!

Long live the New—"Age," "Europe,"  
"Statesman," "Witness"!

Long live each *acti temporis laudator!*

Long live Lloyd George in unmolested  
Pitt-ness!

Long live "The Nation," facile demonstra-  
tor

Of everybody's—save its own—unfitness!

Long live Valera, Carson, Devlin, Plunkett!  
Long live the lads who fight, the cads who  
funk it!

Long live our German banks, *sub duce*  
Plender!

Long may our railways rule our bound-  
ing sea!

Long may impatient Cuthberts paw their  
fender,

What time their patient Phyllis pours  
their tea!

Long life to each investor and each spender!

Long live the Staff! Long live the A.S.E.!  
So long as England's in the melting-pot,  
A prudent bard must sing, "Long live the  
lot!"

For who shall say—at close of Armaged-  
don,

When the world's finished beggaring its  
neighbour,

When the last shell's been fired, the last  
pig fed on—

If we'll be ruled by Capital or Labour:  
If a Welsh harp shall twang part-songs of  
Seddon,

While Simon pipes a compromising  
tabor:

Or whether every stalwart War-Loan-lender's son  
Will find his Empire dividends signed "Henson"?

Not I: not all the better men who fought  
While dilutees preserved their precious skin:

Not those great early dead, whose single thought

Ran—"England: Germany: we've got to *win.*"

Poor simple souls, of H. G. Wells untaught,  
They never realized their next-of-kin  
Would read how they had died to make life cheerier

For the dear blacks in Briningized Nigeria.

Public, forgive your fool; if now and then—

Black bubbles on the verse's stream—  
appear

Thoughts of our worn, unlettered fighting-men;

If sometimes, through the grease-paint's gay veneer,

Truth shews—a wrinkled hag. The traitor pen



Forgets how blood is cheap and paper  
dear:  
And I'm no more the blithe, nut-loving  
squirrel  
Who frisked it in the consulship of Birrell.

Which is, perchance, the reason why my  
mind  
Turns oft to those dear days, now dead  
as mutton;  
When Haldane's soul with Bethmann-Holl-  
weg dined;  
And no one ploughed up golf-greens,  
sown by Sutton,  
To bed the humble tuber's sprouting rind;  
Or dashed off shorthand *billets-doux* in  
Dutton,  
Or changed a blear-eyed pauper to a swell  
man  
In six short weeks of concentrated Pelman:

Why now—sad minstrel in un-Sandoned  
sack-cloth—

I sing the twilight of the times I knew.  
No more our glaring footlights blurr a  
back-cloth

Woven of misery and hung askew;  
For Time, stern judge of Us, has donned  
his black cloth,

And to the Mob delivered up the Few . . .  
Unless, of course, the Mob's but swapped its  
Peers

For a worse dynasty—of profiteers.

God knows, *we* had our faults — greed,  
blindness, pride.

God also knows we had a dashed good  
time.

Were they the worse for that—our boys  
who died,

By earth and air and sea in every clime?  
God knows! But if ghost-feet still strut  
and side

About their clubs, if ghost-eyes read this  
rhyme,

I think they'd like their vanished epoch's  
swan-song

To be a merry tune, and not a wan song.

So clear the stage, and ring the curtain up!

Once more — ere Empires yield to  
Leagues of Nations,

And bayonets to Socialistic gup—

Let Beauty, in diaphanous creations,

Ogle the stalls, and subsequently sup

Off iced champagne and ortolan colla-  
tions . . .

Whereafter, if my pen won't bring me pelf,  
Damned if I don't turn Socialist myself!

### III.

*Sets forth, despite the Law's dull inter-  
ference,  
A lady's birth, age, family, and appear-  
ance.*

Arms have I sung full oft, both steel and  
white ones ;

Guns have I sung till I can sing no more ;  
Men have I sung, both common and polite  
ones :

Yet never sang *one* heroine before.  
Come, then, my ghost-girls, dark, fair,  
plump, and slight ones,  
Come in the finest, flimsiest frocks ye  
wore. . . .

Alas, not one of you quite fills the bill—  
A life-size model for my Lady Jill.

Pardon, then, Magda, Gladys, Nancy, Flo-  
rence,

Doris, Patricia, Mollie, Celandine,  
Nor hold your erstwhile suitor in abhor-  
rence

Because, from one, he takes eyes subtly  
green ;  
From other, hands a Sargent or a Law-  
rence

Had envied for his canvas; here, the  
sheen  
Of gold hair, auburn-shot, in whose abun-  
dance,  
What time Jill dreamed, young Cupids  
watched the sun dance;

There a smooth throat, an arched, attrac-  
tive ankle,

Soft cheek, curved back in bloom to  
close-set ear,

Red mouth full-lipped, a voice whose love-  
tones rankle

Still in this heart of mine,—a voice so  
dear

That . . . But no more! In fear this  
rhyming prank'll

Offend some damozel whom I revere,  
I state: Jill's just an ordinary blonde,  
Fair, frail, flirtatious, rather fast than fond.

You know the type—aristo-plutocratic,  
Out of blue blood by hard North Country  
cash;

A self-assertive sire; a dam, lymphatic  
(Since rarely strawberry leaves and  
sovereigns clash);

Their sole son, daring in the diplomatic  
(Thumping his Underwood while king-  
doms crash);

Their daughter . . . Is there a man alive  
can swear

Exactly what she did or did not dare?

For Jill was one of those astounding  
females,

Born in a chaster, pre-Edwardian day;  
When lone Lucindas dared not dine nor tea  
males

For dread lest scandal dub them "*cory-  
phée*";

When none drank deep of D'Abernonian  
dream-ales,

But quietly our Empire went its way,  
Nor realised that subalterns on horses  
Monopolized the brain-power of its Forces:

One who was yet a span from flapperhood,  
Still puzzling o'er the simplest of equa-  
tions;

What time in robe of saffron Phoebus  
stood,

And all our Lanes were gay with green  
carnations,

And private hansoms sought the Johnian  
Wood,

And the shrill cycle-bell's first tintilla-  
tions

Resounded from the dawning to the dark  
In a Rolls-Royceless, Peter Panless Park:

One who attained the pig-tail's ribboned  
     dowry,  
 And helped to pass a Kipling tambou-  
     rine,  
 When first from lands of wattle, maple,  
     Maori,  
 Men came at summons of a dying Queen :  
 One who, at Auteuil, Dresden, and Rath-  
     gowrie,  
 Acquired that polish reft of which, I  
     ween,  
 It is not possible for our Dianas  
 To emulate a modern *grande dame's* manners :

One on whose head the ostrich-feathers  
     nodded  
 In Alexandrine courts—and *chez* Bas-  
     sano ;  
 In whose young ears, song's angels disem-  
     bodied.  
 Rang the last notes of Melbourne's own  
     soprano ;  
 Whose lithe feet, Moykoff-shod, the grouse-  
     moors plodded,  
 Or danced the new Machiché Brasiliano,  
 In times before, unchaperoned of skinny ma,  
 Suburbia's daughters sought the darkling  
     kinema :  
 To put the matter briefly—One of Them.

Bear witness, Muses Nine, how most un-  
worthy

Is my gold nib to touch their garment's  
hem.

Say, Byron (for as bard I still prefer  
thee

To all whose pallid minor stars be-gem

These Gotha nights) would not such task  
deter thee

From the rhymed octave—sometime known  
as Whistlecraft—

In which, poor ass, I ply this weekly thistle-  
craft?

Oιμοι! that I can never be a poet

Modelled on spoon-fed college Adonäises,  
Whose metres reek of Porson, Jebb, and  
Jowett,

Whose very thoughts derive from don-  
nish dāises.

Alas! for us who, writing life, must know  
it—

Its sights, its scents, its ladies, lords, and  
Läises.

Alas! for my refusal to disseminate—

Even in verse—the scholarly-effeminate.

And oh! ten thousand times alas, should  
Jill

Be recognised in these Parnassian pages

Woe for the libel action, and the bill  
Which he must face who in the law  
engages.

And ah! thank Heaven for a metric skill  
That shields this head from Justice Dar-  
ling's rages . . .

Safeguarded by thy last experience, G. Moore,  
I maiden-name my lady—Lewis-Seymour.



#### IV.

*In which the author, contrary to custom,  
Goes for the gloves—as Sohrab went for  
Rustum.*

I have discovered, after much perusal  
Of Cannan, George Mackenzie, Walpole,  
Bennett,

A Law whose discipline brooks no re-  
fusal,—

A neo-rheo-literary tenet  
Which runs: “In art, forbear to pick and  
choose. All

That happens, happens. Wherefore, up  
and pen it!

Let the scribe’s tale be casual and cursory;  
End where you like—but start us in the  
nursery.”

And so I fain had traced, through many a  
canto,

My heroine; all dimples in her cot;  
Bored with her lessons; laughing at the  
panto.;

Immersed in “Fauntleroy” or Walter  
Scott:

But, since green herbs from memory’s  
*campo santo*

Provide no flavouring for satire's pot,  
For seething, bubbling cauldron such as  
    this is,  
I'll skip the skipping-rope and jump to kisses.

\*           \*           \*           \*           \*

'Tis such a night as only London knew  
    In the full seasons of our heart's con-  
        tent—  
When, like some fairy pageant in review,  
    Love, Pleasure, Luxury together blent,  
Made life not all too boring for the Few;  
    And Unemployment, fix't at ten per  
        cent.,  
Furnished—by all means of charity ba-  
        zaars—  
Right many a dame with perquisites and  
    “pars.”

London, in London's June! Above, the  
    starshine:

    Below, against the rails of Berkeley  
        Square,  
The patient lights of brougham, or rarer  
    car, shine—

    Waiting stiff-shirted squires and ladies  
        fair:

Music, from high French windows that  
    afar shine,

Thrills, till a dancer well might curse  
and swear,  
And call himself a “dashed unlucky fella”  
To miss the Lewis-Seymour’s Cinderella.

Within those halls, where plush-breeched  
flunkeys stand,  
What sounds, what scents, what visions  
of delight!  
How — to the bluest Blue Hungarian  
band—  
Youth whirls away the unreturning  
night!  
How—perfumed as the blooms of Samar-  
cand—  
The dying flow’rets whisper, “Carlton  
White!”  
But, oh! to weary war-time ration-hunters,  
How like a dream, this stand-up supper—  
Gunter’s!

For here, in reach of every slender hand  
which is  
Scarce languidly outstretched to porce-  
lain plate,  
Are dainties drawn from each vale, stream,  
or strand which is  
Most famed for fruit or fish or fowl or  
cate:

Creamed strawberries; thin, lavish-but-  
tered sandwiches  
Of livered geese (that now squawk  
Hymns of Hate),  
Of priceless hams and tongues and caviar;  
ices;  
And sugared sweets in myriad strange de-  
vices. . . .

Yet sweeter far than all these sweet things,  
Jill is:

Queen of my verse and this "Young Peo-  
ple's Dance":

Fairer than fairest of Mayfairy fillies!

Sweet, is the smile that lights a counte-  
nance

Bright as moon-dappled, pink-tipped lotus-  
lilies;

Sweet, are her jade-green eyes that  
gleam and glance—

And give no hint of yester-tea-time's flare-up  
When stern mamma forbade her bind her  
hair up.

Jill's hair! How beautiful it is; the tresses  
Warm-golden, soft as cygnet's earliest  
downing.

Jill's foot! How slim the arch the flounce  
caresses.

Jill's brow! How pure; how yet un-  
creased in frowning.

(My Muse! How easily the jade im-  
presses

On this base coin a stamp of pseudo-  
Browning.)

Jill's youth! Jill's dreams! These luxuries  
that lap her! . . .

Don't they present a most alluring flapper?

So thinks, at least, this lad in evening rai-  
ment—

Shoes, shirt-front, collar, waistcoat-but-  
tons, glowing;

This sub. of other days—when soldier's  
payment

Scarcely sufficed each monthly mess-  
bill's owing,

And triple stars full fifteen years delay  
meant;

He, who presents the goblet, over-flowing  
With icy rubies to its crinkled brim,  
And asks if Jill won't "sit this out" with  
him. . . .

And there it hangs, word-carven, my last  
image.

(Browning again! now Keats!) O hap-  
less pair,

Loth lover and bold maiden of a dim age—  
Lost to us now, and dead, but still most  
fair.

O Attic shapes! Arcadian girlhood's slim  
age,

And silken youth with brilliantined hair!  
What climaxes must I not sacrifice,  
Who write this epic at a weekly price?

For—as long melodies are sweet, but  
sweeter

Poems in short instalments, such as  
mine—

Seven full days, teased puppet of this  
metre,

Must thy parched tongue await that  
roseate wine;

Seven full nights, fond boy, must thou en-  
treat her;

Whilst mantle to her cheeks, incarnadine,  
Youth's beauty, beauty's youth—and readers  
vex't

Know, need know, nothing more till Tuesday  
next.

V.

*Brings life to week-old statues; makes  
them prance  
To love's light tune—and ends the Sey-  
mours' dance.*

Pale shapes I locked in memory's studio,  
Your draperies stir. From vein to mar-  
ble vein  
The life-blood leaps. Eyes gleam, and  
pulses glow.  
Once more my octaves rap their old re-  
frain  
To re-create the weekly puppet-show.  
Fond boy, to work! My Jill's herself  
again,  
And answers your entreaty—sideways glanc-  
ing—  
“Perhaps I will. It's jolly hot for dancing.”

So they twain pass—smart sub. and flap-  
per stately—  
From the high halls of Gunter's prank't  
refection.  
And out across the waxèd boards, where  
lately

Twirled the swift waltz to *La Poupée's*  
"Selection."

And on, past couples gossiping sedately;  
And on, past couples screened against  
detection;

To a dim-shaded, fairy-lighted alcove,  
Fit haunt for single maid and single tall  
cove:—

Such as—in land of Taj Mahal and mug-  
ger,

Where girls book weeks ahead their sup-  
per dances—

Screens some pale flirt, some lad who  
yearns to hug her,

From the brown *khitmatghar's* averted  
glances.

(Who knows thy secrets, darkling *Kala-  
juggah*—

The orbs downcast, the fingers' coy ad-  
vances,

The swiftly stifled sob that hooks the strip-  
ling—

Save I, Victoria Cross, and Rudyard Kip-  
ling!)

And there, beneath the new-sponged pot-  
ted palm-tree,



That mid-day brought and mornnig shall  
 remove—  
 Mayfair's own wind-unruffled, ever-calm  
 tree,  
 Whose drooping branches shield May-  
 fairies' love—  
 She lisps of Waller parts, and thy dead  
 charm, Tree  
 (Twin stars now shining in the "flies"  
 above!);  
 While he admits he has or hasn't seen  
 them . . . .  
 Till a shy sudden silence falls between them,  
 A cloud across the sun of lightling banter.  
  
 O Jill, my gold-spoon cake-and-Moët  
 miss!  
 Hast thou not dreamed, since thy first tam-  
 o'-shanter,  
 Of soldier boy, of dance-night such as  
 this?  
 Faintly they catch the polka's throb, the  
 canter  
 Of homing hansom-cab where lovers  
 kiss:  
 And "Oh," thinks he, "what eyes, what lips,  
 what hair, too!"  
 And "Oh," thinks she "the ninny doesn't dare  
 to."

Voiceless, they sit: but now her eyes, up-  
turning,  
Seek his: and now, beneath the lashes'  
veil,  
Leaps a quick flame to set youth's pulses  
burning;  
And now she feels her resolution fail:  
And now gains strength anew the curious  
yearning  
For love's adventure: now, her fingers  
frail  
Tighten about the kerchief's lacy tissue:  
And now, at last, he says, "Jill, I *must* kiss  
you."

"Bobbie, you mustn't." "Jill—just one."

Her shoulder

Stiffens; resists the half-encircling arm.  
Hands fend away the hand that seeks to  
hold her.

Lips murmur. Lashes flutter in alarm.  
"No, Bobbie. No." My foolish boy, be  
bolder;

The moment's fear is half the moment's  
charm . . .

Alas! His missed and amateurish peck  
Grazes the ear-lobe; lands upon the neck.

Readers, both kissed and kissless, chide  
not; pity

These withered fruits from Jill's dead  
seas of dreaming.

Think—or in France, or in this barraged  
city,

How many a dear one owes his brass  
hat's gleaming,

How many a husband thanks his safe Com-  
mittee,

To some fond woman's sound strategic  
scheming!

Ponder—can crafts which men from want to  
plenty ship,

Be steered without an arduous apprentice-  
ship?

Ponder! Nor blame my Jill if she disguises  
Love's disappointment in disapprobation.

If, Artemis in judgment now, she rises—

The outraged goddess, armed for flagel-  
lation—

And, with a voice whose every note com-  
prises

Disgust, revolt, pain, virtue, indignation,

Drives from her father's chaste, offended  
portals

The meekest of apologising mortals.

And blame not me, her bard—whose verses  
weave her

This coronal of memory's budding-hours,  
Who loved her long ago, yet now must  
leave her

Lorn 'mid the dance's *débris*, and the  
flowers

Which fade as day-dreams of that first  
deceiver—

Because, while War yet ravens and de-  
vours,

While still the blind guns thunder out in  
Flanders,

I sing the type which cozens and philanders.

For, young as Spring and old as Cleopatra,  
Certain as Nature's self, this type en-  
dureth:

On Skindles' lawn, in jungles of Sumatra,  
She blooms—a wax-white weed that no  
rake cureth:

From Westminster to *wats* of Pura Chatra,  
Her false lips smile, her gladsome optic  
lureth:

WAAC's may be WREN's; wars, peace; to-  
day's full Colonel,

To-morrow's clerk . . . but Jill is sempi-  
ternal.

## VI.

*Continues—symptomatically terse—  
This first of serials in doggerel verse.*

O Jill, my peerless, perfumed, powdered  
darling;

Quintessence of all fairies I've adored  
In London's lanes, by Devon Budleigh's far  
ling,

At Berkeley's, Kettner's, Ritz's, Carl-  
ton's board;

Jill whose white hands ne'er knew rough  
house-work's gnarling;

Whose clothes not twenty Coxes could  
afford!

How shall man sing the seasoned cee-sprung  
carriage

In which you rolled from that first kiss to  
marriage?

What days they were! What noon-times  
and what twilights!

The whole wide earth seemed fashioned  
for your pleasure;

Its very heavens, gold-and-crystal skylights

Whereunder you picked orchid blooms at  
leisure.

For others, shadowed gloom; for you, the  
high lights—

The pomp, the pride, the dance's twang-  
ing measure . . .

And if one begged: "Take coin," you'd say,  
"and toss it her.

Poor thing! That skirt was never cut by  
Rossiter."

Dear, *rotten* days! And yet, a Jack grows  
wistful

At thoughts of all the Jills whom he re-  
members,

In times when he had boodle by the fist-full  
And fires of youth—where now are only  
embers.

Jack's Jills! Why, Muse possesses quite a  
list full,

May's Jill, and June's Jill, August's, and  
September's . . .

Yet dares no more than skim each light ad-  
venture

Which followed on flirtation's indenture.

For there's a tide in the affairs of flappers,  
Of those, at least, that West End  
mothers breed—  
(Your Wapping matron's more inclined to  
slap *hers*:  
A vulgar trick—yet one which serves  
some need!)—  
A spring-time blood-tide, mounting to  
young nappers,  
Heady as wine, a mischief-making mead,  
Which—though a man find every known ex-  
cuse for 'em—  
To put it mildly, does the very deuce for 'em.  
And shall my sweetest Muse, than whom  
none chaster  
E'er fluttered to console the middle-age-  
time  
Of any neurasthenic poetaster,  
Ope her full throat to sing Jill's 'prentice  
rage-time?—  
The unnerving doubts, the certainties  
which braced her,  
The follied moments and the ensuing  
sage time,  
The major and the minor bards who sung to  
her,  
The men who knelt, the "little friends" who  
clung to her;

The last strange morning-dreams, the tea-tray's rattle,  
The letters — opened, skimmed, and tossed aside;  
The leisured getting-up, the breakfast-prattle,  
The summoning 'phone-bell and the mid-day ride;  
The lunch; the afternoons of tittle-tattle—  
Town's latest scandal, dance, divorce or bride;  
The "dear boys," climbers, *partis*, portion-stalkers;  
The furtive teas at Charbonnel and Walker's;  
The Morny-scented bath before the dinner;  
The deft maid's fingers in the unruly hair;  
The *risqué* talk of some sweet social sinner,  
Half-heard across the table's candle-glare;  
The Bridge, so much too high for a beginner;  
The Ball; the moment's whisper on the stair:  
The thousand faces, phases, thoughts, books, travellings,  
Which whirl youth's silk cocoon in its unravellings.



Ah no! not ours with huckstering pen to  
retail

How slumb'rous beauties wake from  
girl-time's dozing.

Let Hubert Wales and D. H. Lawrence  
detail

The purpled passion-blossom's slow un-  
closing.

No rainbow's purple e'er shall tinge our  
she-tale,

No censor's yoke restrain its swift com-  
posing.

Moreover—quite apart from Muse's purity—  
There's nothing half so dull as immaturity.

So please imagine—(though I know it's  
risky

To trust in Britons for imagination,  
Save those rare few whom peace-time's  
hoarded whisky

Still fires to spiritual exaltation,  
Or such as stand, when questioning House  
grows frisky,

Pat on their first inspired assevera-  
tion)—

Jill as she was in times of sugared plenty:  
The Bond Street goddess, *àtât* three-and-  
twenty.

Goddess, indeed! These meagre days that  
skimp us,

Poor mortals, bullied, badged, and  
bombed and rationed,

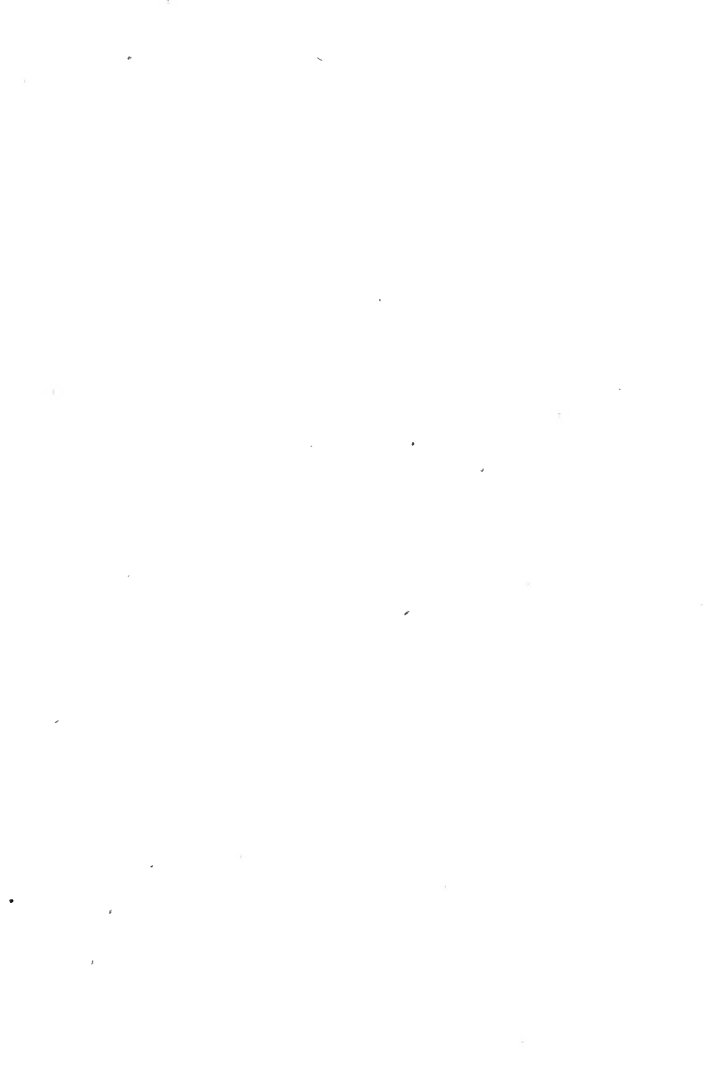
Scarce knows that breed which once on  
high Olympus

Flaunted in radiant raiment, Poiret-  
fashioned.

Goddess indeed! A self-sure, jade-eyed,  
slim puss—

Of life's each latest luxury impassioned;  
Sleek; mateless; restless; rampant; supple-  
sinewed;

Sharp-clawed; capricious; and . . . *to be  
continued.*



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